University of Alberta

Understanding Bullying from the Student Perspective

by

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Introduction

Overview of the Issue

Many students face intimidation, shame, threats of physical violence, and social exclusion every day while attending school. The phenomenon of bullying has been affecting students across the world and has been a topic of much international research activity (e.g., Boulton, 1999; Rois-Ellis, Bellamy, & Shoji, 2000; Smith, Cowie, Olafsson, & Liefooghe, 2002). It is estimated that approximately one third of Canadian students have been bullied (O'Connell, Pepler, & Craig, 1999). Bullying has been associated with poor mental and physical health in both bullies and those who are bullied (Roland, 2002), and may result in the targets of bullying experiencing maladaptive self-blame (Graham & Juvonen, 1998).

Relevance of the Study

Much important research has been conducted on the instance and prevention of bullying in school, and a comprehensive, generally agreed-upon definition of the term has emerged. However, this general definition has been created primarily by researchers and those active in preventing bullying. There is little understanding of how those most affected by the issue may define the term bullying, and little empirical evidence that the definition of bullying generally used by researchers (e.g., Olweus, 2001) reflects the definitions held by those most affected. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that researchers include certain behaviours in their definitions of bullying that are not included in the definitions of students (e.g., Arora, 1996; Guerin & Hennessey, 2002). A richer understanding of the definitions of bullying by those

most involved in the phenomenon could be of great importance to future research in the area.

Recently, there has been an increased interest in bullying by police and those involved in other community programs outside the school. For instance, Edmonton City Council has passed a bylaw against bullying (Preston, 2002). A better understanding of the way students understand the term bullying may also lead to more effective intervention and prevention programs.

Adolescents and Bullying

Bullying is a significant problem among junior high school students, at a time when peer approval is of particular importance (Espelage & Holt, 2001). In this age group, bullying has been associated with poor mental and physical health, as well as increased suicidal ideation, in both bullies and those who are bullied (Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, Rantanen & Rempela, 2000; Roland, 2002), and there is also preliminary evidence from longitudinal studies on bullying supporting the argument that bullying in school is the indirect cause of decreases in the physical and mental health of those who are bullied (Olweus, 1992). For example, Rigby (2001) found that bullying predicts anxiety, depression, and physical complaints in those students who had been bullied.

The likelihood of a student reporting bullying to a teacher or parent decreases as adolescents enter junior high school (Whitney & Smith, 1993), which means that adolescents may be at a distinct risk of suffering the negative consequences of bullying without intervention and assistance from an outside source. For these reasons, it is important to examine how adolescent students define bullying.

It has also been shown that adolescents can better distinguish between different types of aggressive behaviours and tend to have a less inclusive definition of bullying than younger students (Smith et al., 2002). Adolescent students are better able to discriminate between aggressive behaviour that is bullying and aggressive behaviour that is not bullying, such as two friends play-fighting (Smith & Levan, 1995). Adolescent students are an appropriate and important group to study when examining student perceptions of bullying because they are able to distinguish between the different types of aggressive behaviours under investigation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore whether the defining characteristics of the term bullying as used by researchers adequately reflects the use of the term by students. The concept of bullying may be thought of as what Herbert Blumer (1954) would refer to as a *sensitizing concept:* it is difficult to determine a concrete definition or class of behaviours that can fully describe this concept. Instead, it is often conceptualized in terms of examples of typical bullying behaviour. Therefore, this study does not attempt to provide a concrete definition of bullying, but instead examines the defining characteristics of bullying used by both researchers and students.

This thesis investigates which classes of behaviours and defining characteristics the majority of junior high school students include in their definitions of bullying. Further purposes of the study are to examine whether a relationship exists between students' prior experiences of bullying and their definitions of bullying, and

to examine the incidence of bullying in this population for a comparison to the incidence of bullying in the general Canadian population.

Design

This study uses quantitative and qualitative methodology to examine the characteristics and categories of behaviours students include in their definitions of bullying. The results were compared to current research in this topic area. A descriptive research design was used to explore student definitions of bullying, and their experiences of being bullied. This information was then used in a correlational research design to explore how students' definitions of bullying may be related to their personal experience with the issue.

Research Questions

This study will address the following questions:

1. What characteristics and categories of behaviour do students include in their definitions of bullying?
2. What are possible influences on students' tendencies to see certain behaviours as bullying?
3. What is the incidence of bullying in this population?

Literature Review

A History of the Terms Used in Research on Bullying

"Mobbing" was the first term used in the bullying research tradition to describe the phenomenon. First studied in Sweden by Heinemann (for a discussion see Olweus, 2001), the term referred to violent behaviours directed at one student by a group of students, or "mob." This behaviour tended to occur suddenly and abate just as abruptly, much like the idea of mobs in the social psychology literature (Alcock, Carment, & Sadava, 1998). According to Smith and colleagues (2002), a similar concept appears in the German literature on peer aggression. Olweus, a pioneer in the area of bullying research, adopted the term and then replaced it with the term "bullying," within which he included a broader scope of behaviour. Specifically, Olweus sought to include aggressive behaviour that occurs over longer periods of time and may involve only small groups or a single student as the aggressor. While initially focusing on physically aggressive behaviours, Olweus later changed his definition to include psychological bullying (2001). This includes concepts of social exclusion, such as being purposely excluded from a group or activity, and relational aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995) or social aggression (Galen & Underwood, 1997), which consists of behaviours such as gossiping or spreading rumours.

The study of peer aggression has had a lengthier research history in Europe and has more recently become of interest to North American researchers. In a comparison of the two research traditions, Olweus (2001) describes the early North American studies of peer aggression to be focused mainly upon the concept of peer

rejection; that is, the studies tended to focus on status in the peer group as judged by peer nominations. Graham and Juvonen (2001) also make the distinction that North American research has focused more predominately upon the aggressor rather than the target of aggressive behaviour, and that researchers in North American have been more inclined to use the term *peer victimization*, or *peer harassment*.

Salmivalli (2001) makes a distinction between peer victimization and bullying, by noting that the concept of bullying tends to be defined by researchers in terms of the persistence and repetition of aggressive actions in conjunction with an imbalance of power between the bully and the target, whereas the concept of peer victimization tends to be broader and include all aggressive acts which might not otherwise fit these criteria.

Researcher Definitions of Bullying

Those researchers who identify themselves as studying the phenomenon of bullying typically include certain specific elements in their definition of the term. Farrington (1993) describes six criteria which can be used to determine whether an action should be considered bullying:

- *Behaviour.* The act, whether by an individual or group is aggressive in nature. Many definitions have included aggressive acts that are physical, verbal or psychological in nature.
- *Intent.* The aggressor or group has a malicious intent toward the target of the behaviour.

- *Imbalance of Power.* The targets of the aggressive behaviour are in some way unable to defend themselves as a result of an imbalance of power between the aggressor and the target.
- *Repetition.* The aggressive behaviour is repeated or persistently targeted at the same individual.
- *Lack of Provocation.* The aggressive behaviour is not provoked in any way by the target of the behaviour.
- *Effect on the Target.* The aggressive behaviour has a negative impact upon the target of this behaviour. The act harms the individual in some way.

Guerin and Hennessey (2002) provide a detailed description of how researchers' definitions tend to reflect or omit these aspects of bullying. A brief discussion of these contrasting ideas in the research literature will follow, with a discussion of the behaviours included in researchers' definitions of bullying and the more contextual elements of Farrington's criteria.

Bullying behaviours in researcher definitions. There are many types of aggressive behaviour which may be considered to be bullying. The following categories of behaviour have been discussed in the literature:

- *Physically aggressive behaviours.* These behaviours are physical in nature and include acts such as hitting, kicking, pushing, or punching.
- *Verbally aggressive behaviours.* These behaviours include direct verbal taunts, name-calling, and threats.
- *Indirectly aggressive behaviours.* These behaviours typically tend to occur through a third party and tend to affect peer relationships.

Most researchers tend to include physically aggressive behaviour as well as verbally aggressive behaviour in their definitions of bullying (e.g., Hazler et al., 2001; Olweus, 1993). However, in discussing verbal aggression, a debate has emerged regarding the concepts of teasing and bullying. Many researchers are unclear as to when a verbal taunt should be thought of as teasing, and when it should be thought of as bullying. Olweus (2001) defines teasing as playful, without the intent to hurt the target, and does not include teasing in his definition of bullying. Other researchers (Espelage & Holt, 2001) argue that regardless of intent, teasing should be identified as bullying when it has a negative effect upon the person being teased.

Other researchers mark a distinction between direct and indirect forms of bullying (Björkqvist, Lagerpetz & Kaukianen, 1992; see also Olweus, 1993; Smith et al., 2002). Rivers and Smith (1994) describe direct aggression as involving face-to-face confrontation, while indirect aggression typically occurs through a third party, such as spreading rumours or persuading others not to include someone. The term *relational aggression* has been used to describe behaviours which disrupt a student's relationships with others (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995), such as spreading rumours or attempting to break up a friendship. The term *social exclusion* has typically been used to refer to behaviour which results in the exclusion of a student from group activities (Land, 2003; Smith et al., 2002). The majority of researchers include indirect aggressive behaviours such as social exclusion in their definitions of bullying (Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000; Rigby, 2001)

In addition, some researchers consider acts of *discrimination* to be bullying, such as aggressive actions targeted at minority groups (e.g., Swain, 1998). Other

researchers include *sexual harassment* as a bullying behaviour (e.g., Sanchez et al., 2001).

Contextual elements in researcher definitions. Of Farrington's (1993) other, more contextual criteria, most researchers tend to agree that the intent of the aggressor to hurt the target is an important component of bullying. A power imbalance between aggressor and target is also generally included among definitions of researchers, however, researchers do not always identify the nature of the imbalance of power (Guerin & Hennessey, 2002). For example, according to Olweus (1993), an imbalance of power is defined as the target feeling unable to defend himself or herself. He originally described an imbalance of power in terms of physical strength and weakness, and later included differences in mental ability as a form of power imbalance (Olweus, 1997). Guerin and Hennessey include a student's popularity or number of friends as factors which could also comprise an imbalance of power.

Not all of Farrington's (1993) criteria are universal to the definitions of researchers studying the phenomenon. While most researchers tend to include repetition as an important part of their definitions, it appears that some researchers are more rigid than others in applying this to all cases of bullying. For example, Hazler, Miller and Smith (2001) argue that, no matter how severe, if an act is not repeated over time, then it should not be considered bullying. Conversely, Olweus emphasizes that while bullying is generally repeated over time, a "single incident of more serious harassment" may also be considered bullying (Olweus, 1993, p. 9). In this instance, it is argued by some researchers that the target of an isolated aggressive act may live in

fear of the next attack (Arora, 1996). For example, Guerin and Hennessey (2002) state that "if the incident happens just once, but the fear is lasting, it may be defined as bullying," (p. 251).

There is also disagreement as to whether bullying is necessarily always unprovoked. While many researchers agree that bullying generally refers to aggressive acts that are not provoked (Smith et al., 2002; Swain, 1998), other researchers disagree. For instance, Schwartz, Proctor, and Chien (2001) argue that a class of students they label as the *aggressive victim* may be both a bully and a victim, or may provoke bullying through aggressive actions. The existence of students who may be aggressive while still the targets of bullying blurs the line between bully and victim and makes a complete definition of bullying more difficult.

In addition, there is some uncertainty among researchers as to the effect of the behaviour on the target of bullying. It appears that while some researchers (e.g., Arora, 1996; Land, 2003) included this element of bullying, there are many other researchers who do not include the effect on the target as part of their definition of bullying (Boulton, Bucci, & Hawker, 1999; Olweus, 1993; Smith et al., 2002; Swain, 1998). In defining bullying, it appears that many researchers tend to view the intent of the aggressor as more important than the effect of the aggressive act on the target.

Although there is some debate among researchers about what constitutes bullying, there seems to be a general agreement that bullying includes physical, verbal and indirect aggressive behaviours that are intentional in nature and involve an imbalance of power between the bully and the target of bullying. Debate still exists about whether teasing should be considered bullying, the necessity of behaviours

being repeated over time, the issue of provocative or aggressive victims, and the importance of the effect of bullying on the target.

Student Definitions of Bullying

It is clear that not all researchers agree upon the exact definition of bullying to be used. Arora (1996) argues that the definitions of researchers are not based upon the perception of the public or the perception of students, but are strictly the opinion of the researchers. She argues that the definitions of researchers studying bullying:

> are based on the various authors' opinions on what constitutes bullying, that is, the authors have predefined their own views of what is bullying and have used these to collect further data on the incidence of bullying, a frequently used strategy in bullying research (p. 320).

In this way, researcher definitions of bullying may not be reflective of the definitions held by students. Subsequently, it is also important to examine student definitions of bullying, as they are the most affected by this phenomenon. Becoming aware of the way in which students conceptualize bullying can add depth to our understanding of bullying. An examination of student definitions can ensure that both researchers and students understand one another when beginning a discourse about bullying.

Bullying behaviours in student definitions. While some researchers claim that there seems to be an agreement between researchers and students as to which behaviours constitute bullying (Guerin & Hennessey, 2002; Naylor, Cowie, & del Ray, 2001), there are contradictory findings that suggest that the agreement between researchers and students may not be so straightforward. For example, Arora (1996)

reports that the majority of British adolescent students surveyed tended to associate bullying mainly with physical aggression. Yet Boulton and colleagues (1999) found that the majority of British and Swedish adolescent students studied "did not accept that bullying is only when physical force is used," (p. 280). Smith and colleagues (2002) also found that adolescent students from a number of different countries included direct and indirect verbal aggression in their concepts of bullying, indicating that they do not believe that bullying consists only of purely physically aggressive acts. There are also findings to suggest that students are able to distinguish teasing from bullying (Land, 2003; Smith et al., 1999), and that the majority of students consider teasing to be bullying when it is intended to hurt the person being teased (Espidage & Asidao, 2001).

There are somewhat contradictory findings as to whether students consider relationally aggressive behaviours to be bullying. In a study of British pre-adolescent students, Swain (1998) found that 97% agreed that "telling nasty stories about someone again and again," (p. 361) is bullying. This is an example of behaviour that is relationally aggressive and suggests that the majority of students believe this type of behaviour to be bullying. However, a study by Guerin and Hennessey (2002) found that only 19% of the adolescent Irish students studied included relationally aggressive behaviour in their definitions. No gender differences were found. It is possible that the differences in these findings are due to the different age range or countries of the participants involved. It is also possible that the methodology used in these studies impacted the differences in results. Where the study by Swain involved asking students directly whether relational aggression was bullying, the study by

Guerin and Hennessey asked students to describe bullying in an interview format and then coded whether relational aggression was mentioned. It is possible that students may not think of relationally aggressive behaviour as the most typical form of bullying, but may agree that this behaviour is bullying when asked directly. Clearly, more research is needed to determine how students understand relationally aggressive behaviours in regards to bullying.

There is also some contradictory evidence as to whether students consider social exclusion to be bullying. Some researchers have found that over half of the students surveyed about their perceptions of bullying include behaviour that results in social exclusion (Boulton et al., 1999; Smith & Levan, 1995; Swain, 1998). Yet other studies have shown that the majority of students do not think that social exclusion is bullying (Boulton, 1997; Guerin & Hennessey, 2002). For example, Boulton (1999) and colleagues reported that 60% of the British and Swedish adolescent students studied agreed that leaving someone out can be bullying, while Guerin and Hennessey (2002) reported that only 12% of the Irish adolescent students studied included social exclusion as part of their descriptions of bullying. Based upon this evidence, it is also difficult to determine the true nature of students' definitions of bullying in regards to social exclusion.

In addition, there is little research exploring students' perceptions of sexual harassment as a type of bullying behaviour. In a study of American adolescent students, Land (2003) found that when asked to give an example of bullying, only 10% included any aggressive behaviour that was sexual in nature. It is unknown whether students may be more likely to agree that sexual harassment can be

considered a bullying behaviour if directly asked. There also appears to be no research assessing students' inclusion of discriminatory behaviours in their understanding of bullying.

Contextual elements in student definitions. Little research has been conducted as to whether students include the elements of Farrington's (1993) criteria in their definitions of bullying. Guerin and Hennessey (2002) found that the elements of intent, repetition, and lack of provocation may not be central to the definitions of bullying among adolescent students. Madsen (1996) also found that the elements of repetition, intent, lack of provocation, and an imbalance of power were included in only 3-16% of students' definitions of bullying. However, approximately 40% of student participants in both Guerin and Hennessey's study and Madsen's study included the negative effect on the target to be part of their definition of bullying. This suggests that the effect on the target may be central to the definitions of students, whereas, the elements of intent, repetition, and lack of provocation may be less important. There is contrasting evidence among these two studies as to the importance students place on an imbalance of power in their definitions of bullying.

Student perceptions of bullying across cultures. A landmark study by Smith and colleagues explored how students from fourteen countries differentiated between separate categories of bullying behaviours. In this study, the researchers explored the meanings attached to the words in different languages which may be similar to bullying. Results indicate that cross-culturally, there may not always be a word which correlates directly with bullying, making it difficult to generalize research findings about bullying across languages. For example, Smith and colleagues found

that the Japanese word, *ijime*, which has often been compared to the word bullying, was less likely to refer to physical bullying behaviour than the English word bullying, and more likely to refer to verbal bullying behaviour. A study by Boulton and colleagues (1999) also suggests cultural differences in the way bullying is understood by adolescent students in England and Sweden. The results of this study suggest that the majority of English students included verbal aggression such as name calling in their definitions of bullying, while the majority of Swedish students did not consider this to be bullying. Conversely, the majority of Swedish students were found to include social exclusion in their definitions of bullying, while the majority of English students did not consider this to be bullying.

To date, there have not been any cross-cultural comparisons of the definitions of bullying that have included Canadian participants. Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether the definitions of Canadian students parallel those of the students in the largely European countries where this type of research has been conducted.

Olweus' Definition of Bullying

The most widely used definition in the bullying research tradition is Dan Olweus' definition of bullying. Olweus' definition has been continually refined over the course of his research (e.g., Olweus, 1978, 1993), and now includes a specific set of behaviours. The definition used in the Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (Olweus, 2001) is currently considered a standard in many research studies (e.g., O'Connell Pepler & Craig, 1999) as well as recent intervention programs in the United States (Centre for the Study and Prevention of Violence, 2002) and reads as follows:

We say *a student is being bullied when another student, or several other students*

- say mean and hurtful things or make fun of him or her or call him or her mean and hurtful names
- completely ignore or exclude him or her from their group of friends or leave him or her out of things on purpose
- hit, kick, push, shove around, or lock him or her inside a room
- tell lies or spread false rumors about him or her or send mean notes and try to make other students dislike him or her
- and do other hurtful things like that.

When we talk about bullying, these things happen repeatedly, and it *is difficult for the student being bullied to defend himself or herself.* We also call it bullying when a student is teased repeatedly in a mean and hurtful way.

But we *don't call it bullying* when the teasing is done in a friendly and playful way. Also, it is *not bullying* when two students of about the same strength or power argue or fight [italics in original] (p. 6).

Included in this definition are some of the elements of Farrington's (1993) definition of bullying: repetition, imbalance of power, and intent. This definition does not specifically refer to the elements of lack of provocation and effect on the target. As well, Olweus addresses many of the categories of bullying behaviour discussed above: physically aggressive behaviour, verbally aggressive behaviour, relationally aggressive behaviour, and behaviour resulting in social exclusion.

Discriminatory behaviours and sexual harassment are not directly referred to in this definition.

Many research studies use Olweus' Bully/Victim Questionnaire or a form of the questionnaire that has been slightly modified (e.g., Whitney & Smith, 1993). This questionnaire provides students with a definition of bullying at the beginning and then uses the term bullying throughout the remainder of the questionnaire. This is a technique also used by other researchers using questionnaires to examine bullying (Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000; Roland, 2002). However, this technique may not result in a completely valid assessment of students' experiences of bullying. Even if a researcher provides a comprehensive definition of bullying at the outset of a questionnaire, those involved may revert back to their own personal definition of the term as they proceed to answer questions which include the word bullying (Smith et al., 2002).

To date, there has been no direct comparison between Olweus' definition of bullying and the definitions used by students. Such a comparison is necessary, as students may be using their own definitions of bullying, even provided a definition at the outset of a questionnaire.

Possible Influences on Students' Perceptions of Bullying

There are a number of factors which may influence a student's definition of bullying. For example, the age of students has been shown to play a role in students' inclusion of certain behaviours in their definitions of bullying. Younger students appear to have a different definition of bullying than adolescent students (Smith et al., 2002; Smith & Levan, 1995). This makes it difficult to compare research data across

age groups, particularly if researchers use a method of gathering data which involves using the word bullying, as students may be reverting their own definitions of bullying.

The relationship between gender and student definitions of bullying has also been studied, and there have been no data to suggest that gender influences students' definitions of bullying when directly asked (Boulton, 1999; Smith et al., 2002) and when asked to provide a spontaneous example (Guerin & Hennessey, 2002). Therefore it is expected that gender will not be related to a student indicating that certain behaviours are indicative of bullying.

Personal experience with bullying may also be related to the definitions given to the word bullying by students. While no research has been done to investigate the relationship of students' experiences with bullying to their definitions of bullying, there has been research to show that personal experience with an issue may be related to the meaning one assigns to words about that issue. For example, Glueck, Ernst and Unger (2002) studied individuals' definitions of the word *creativity*. In a study of creative professionals, they found that a person's definition of creativity was related to how they experienced creativity in their profession. A study by Walters and Gilbert (2000) also found that the definition of the word *addiction* varied according to whether it was being defined by a person with an addiction or a helping professional working with addiction issues. It appears that an individual's specific experiences with a phenomenon are related to their definitions of that phenomenon. Therefore, it is possible that students' experiences with bullying may relate to the way in which they define this word. The phenomenon of bullying may be better understood if it

can be determined whether there are differences in the definitions of the word according to personal experience with bullying. This study will seek to address whether students' experiences with being the target of bullying may be related to their definitions of bullying.

Uncertainties in the Literature Addressed by this Study

This study was designed to address specific uncertainties which exist in the literature. Firstly, this study examines Canadian students' perceptions of bullying in order to compare with the information gathered in the largely European studies of students' perceptions of bullying. This study intends to address the gaps between researcher and student definitions of bullying by examining the behaviours students include in their definitions of bullying. In particular, the following categories of bullying and non-bullying behaviour are examined, based upon the work of Smith and colleagues (2002):

- Physically aggressive behaviour
- Verbally aggressive behaviour
- Behaviour resulting in social exclusion
- Relationally aggressive behaviours
- Discriminatory behaviour
- Sexual harassment
- Non-aggressive behaviour and aggressive behaviour between equals.

This study was also designed to clarify whether the method used for asking students about their definitions of bullying may account for the inconsistencies in the findings on relational aggression and social exclusion: students in this study were

asked to provide a spontaneous definition of bullying and they were asked directly about whether they consider specific behaviours to be bullying using a questionnaire. The most commonly used definition of bullying in the research was also directly examined to determine the validity for its use with adolescent students. Results are directly comparable to Olweus' (2001) definition of bullying. Lastly, this study also investigates how students' personal experience with bullying relates to their definitions of bullying.

Method

Design

An exploratory research design was used to investigate student perceptions of bullying as well as their experiences of being bullied. A combination of methods was used to ascertain the contextual elements of Farrington's (1993) definition of bullying and the types of behaviours that adolescent students considered to be bullying. The following questions were examined:

1. What characteristics and categories of behaviour do students include in their definitions of bullying?
2. What are possible influences on students' tendencies to see certain behaviours as bullying?
3. What is the incidence of bullying in this population?

To answer the first question, participants were asked to provide an example of bullying which was coded as to these criteria using content analysis. Participants were also asked directly whether certain behaviours were indicative of bullying using a questionnaire. Descriptive statistics such as the percentages of students who considered specific behaviours or certain contextual elements to be bullying were reported. To answer the second question, a correlational research design was used to explore how perspectives of bullying may be related to personal experience with this issue. The relationship between gender differences and students' tendencies to see certain behaviours as bullying was also examined. To answer the third question, percentages of students who had experienced bullying, as defined by the majority of participants, were reported.

Participants

A school was approached for involvement in the study, from which all grade seven and eight classes were then sampled. The school is attended by students in grades seven to twelve. The grade seven and eight classes were selected for sampling because of findings that younger and newer students or students in the lowest grades in the school may experience more bullying (as bullies, the bullied, or witnesses) compared to other students in the school (Pelligrini & Bartini, 2000). Voluntary parental permission was obtained for student participation, and students were also given a choice whether to participate in the study. A response rate of 61% (of 144 students approached) was obtained.

The participants in this study were grade seven and eight students (n = 88) attending a combined junior/senior high school in rural Alberta. The participants consisted of 33 males (37.5%) and 50 females (62.5%), with 5 participants not stating their gender. There were 34 (13 male and 18 female) participants in grade seven (39%) and 54 (20 male and 32 female) participants in grade eight (61%). The gender frequencies in this sample did not differ significantly from gender frequencies of the population of grade seven and eight students at the school [$\chi^2(1, N = 144) = 1.778$, $p = .182$]. The participants in this study were ages 12 to 14 with a mean age of 13.

Variables

The two main variables in this study are: the participants' perceptions of bullying and the participants' experiences of being bullied. The participants' perceptions of bullying were measured in part by classifying peer harassment behaviour into categories based upon a study by Smith and colleagues (2000), in

which bullying behaviour was categorized as non-aggressive behaviour (non-bullying behaviour), physically aggressive behaviour, verbally aggressive behaviour, behaviour resulting in social exclusion, and relationally aggressive behaviour. In addition, discriminatory behaviour, sexual harassment and aggressive behaviour between equals (friends or two peers of the same strength or social standing) were also used as classifications of bullying behaviour.

Measures

Data were collected using a questionnaire that consisted of 71 items (see Appendix B). The questionnaire was developed by the researcher based upon a review of the literature. Section A of the questionnaire invites participants to relate a typical example of bullying and provides approximately half of a standard page for the response. This question was modified using the qualitative critical incident technique (e.g., Kemppainen, 2000; Byrne, 2001).

Section B of the questionnaire is designed to assess those behaviours considered part of the concept of bullying. This section consists of 35 statements of behaviours and asks participants to rate the degree to which they think the items are representative of bullying behaviour. Participants were asked to rate on a five-point scale the degree to which they thought the item was indicative of bullying behaviour. Section C of the questionnaire is designed to establish the participants' personal experience with those behaviours. This section consists of the same 35 statements modified to assess whether the participant has experienced the behaviour. Participants were asked to rate on a four-point scale the degree to which they have personally experienced the situation described by the item. The degree of frequency

options were derived based upon studies of the prevalence of bullying (Solberg & Olweus, 2003; Whitney & Smith, 1993). Based upon the participants' own definitions of bullying in Section B, this assesses the degree to which the participants have been the victims of this bullying behaviour.

The items in Sections B and C were created to reflect current definitions of bullying in the literature. In particular, the first 13 items were reflective of the definition used in the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (2001). The remaining items were a combination of terms used in Olweus' definition as well as examples of the categories of behaviour discussed above: non-aggressive behaviour physically aggressive behaviour, verbally aggressive behaviour, behaviour resulting in social exclusion, relationally aggressive behaviour, discriminatory behaviour, sexual harassment and aggressive behaviour between equals. Items relating to each category were not mutually exclusive, for example, an item may reflect a verbally aggressive behaviour resulting in social exclusion. Repetition of behaviour, an imbalance of power, and single aggressors vs. aggression by a group were also made explicit in some of the questions relating to each category of behaviour.

Procedures

After approval by the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, the principal of the school was approached and given information about the study. The principal then relayed this information to the school division and gave written permission for the study to be conducted in the school.

Parental consent to participate in the study was gathered by sending consent forms by mail to parents with a self-addressed stamped envelope. The

parent/guardian mailing list was obtained from the school with permission of the principal. Reminder parental consent forms were also distributed at school to the students two days prior to data collection.

Students were also asked to sign a research assent form before participating, which described the purpose of the study and their right to not participate. A team of researchers, including the author and research assistants, collected the questionnaire data. The questionnaire was administered to the participants in class and collected immediately. With the school's permission, a block or class period was chosen to administer the questionnaire to all participants. This prevented participants from discussing the questionnaire with students who may later participate, as all participants completed the questionnaire during the same class period.

Research assistants also read a prepared statement outlining the purpose of the study, the amount of time the study would take, the right of students to not participate in the study even if their parents had given consent, and the right of students to withdraw their participation part way through the data collection. Participants were also made aware that questionnaires were to be collected anonymously and that their name would not be attached to their responses, nor would their responses be read by their parents or teachers.

Research assistants were briefed before data collection to read the statements directly as written, not to include students for whom parental permission was not received, and to follow the written procedures provided to them by the researcher. Research assistants were also briefed to conclude data collection with a statement informing students that if they have any questions or concerns about the issue of

bullying, to talk to a responsible adult that they trust. This statement was recommended as appropriate by the school's principal.

Results

Properties of the Questionnaire

Table I provides a list of the internal consistency reliability of the categories of behaviour used in the questionnaire. Of note are the low alpha coefficients for the categories of non-aggressive behaviour and aggressive behaviour between equals, the two categories which were meant to refer to behaviour which is generally not considered bullying. This indicates that the items in these categories, while still generally not considered bullying, do not appear to refer to the same class of behaviours. Also of note is the discrimination category which had an alpha coefficient of only .71. This indicates that the category of discrimination used in this questionnaire may not refer to the same class of behaviours and is interpreted with caution.

Question One: What Characteristics and Categories of Behaviour Do Students Include in Their Definitions of Bullying?

Elements of bullying included in a spontaneous definition. A content analysis was conducted to analyze the responses to Section A of the questionnaire, and specifically investigate whether participants included certain categories in their un-prompted examples of bullying. The analysis relied upon both inductive and deductive category development (Maryring, 2000). Using conceptual analysis, the written text was broken down into phrases and sorted into the pre-determined categories; the remaining phrases were analyzed and grouped into meaningful categories. A moderate level of generalization was utilized, for example, phrases

Table I

Categories of Investigated Behaviours

Category	Cronbach's alpha
Non-aggressive behaviour	.51
Physically aggressive behaviour	.83
Verbally aggressive behaviour	.83
Social exclusion	.88
Relationally aggressive behaviour	.81
Discrimination	.71
Sexual harassment	.84
Aggressive behaviour between equals	.62

such as "punching," "beating up," and "kicking," were grouped together in the physical aggression category.

The pre-determined categories of physically aggressive behaviour, verbally aggressive behaviour, behaviour resulting in social exclusion, relationally aggressive behaviour, sexual harassment and discrimination were investigated and the content analysis showed the following results:

- 60% (53/88) of participants included verbally aggressive behaviours in their typical example of bullying, and used words and phrases such as "calling names," and "teasing."
- 45% (40/88) of participants included physically aggressive behaviours in their typical example of bullying, and used words such as "punching," "shoving," and "pushing."
- 3% (3/88) of participants included relationally aggressive behaviours in their typical example of bullying, and used phrases such as "get others to hate him."
- The percentage of participants that included social exclusion, sexual harassment and discrimination was 1% (1/88) for each category.

Other pre-determined categories of behaviour specifically investigated included elements of the bullying definition used by Farrington (1993): repetition of behaviour, an imbalance of power, lack of provocation, effect on the target, and intent. The content analysis showed the following results:

- 19% (17/88) of participants included the effect on the target as part of their typical example of bullying, and used phrases such as, "when someone hurts others physically and mentally," and "abusing another person."
- 18% (16/88) of participants included an imbalance of power between bully and victim as part of their typical example of bullying, and used phrases such as, "usually the bully is bigger and stronger, or popular."
- 13% (11/88) of participants included the intention of the aggressor as part of their typical example of bullying, and used phrases such as, "on purpose," and "being mean."
- 7% (6/88) of participants included the repetition of behaviour as part of their typical example of bullying, and used words such as "constantly," "repeatedly," and "always."
- 1% (1/88) of participants included a lack of provocation as part of their typical example of bullying and used the phrase "for no certain reason."

After examining the remaining words and phrases, a remaining but noteworthy category was formed. This category reflects coercive behaviours which imply the use of threat or force to obtain something.

- 27% of participants included coercion as part of their typical example of bullying, and used phrases such as, "forcing a person to do something," and "using threats or violence to obtain money."

Behaviours considered to be bullying. The scale used for Section B of the questionnaire consists of a five point scale. The points correspond to the following phrases: *Definitely not bullying* (1); *Probably not bullying* (2); *Unsure* (3); *Probably*

bullying (4)*; and Definitely bullying* (5). To determine the items which the students considered to be bullying, the following criteria were established: an item was considered to be identified as bullying by the students if the mean was greater than four (*Probably bullying*) and the median and mode were both five (*Definitely bullying*). These criteria were used to establish only which items may be undoubtedly considered to be bullying by participants. Using these criteria, 22 of the 35 items were identified as behaviours which the students considered to be bullying. Table II provides a list of those 22 items and their means. Item 14, "A student makes fun of another student by calling them 'gay'," had a mean of 4.25, a mode of five and a median of four, meaning it did not fully meet the criteria stated above.

There is diversity in the participants' perceptions of bullying behaviour as indicated by the range of responses to the 35 items in Section B. Twenty-eight of the items had a full range of 4, meaning that participants provided the full range of responses from *Definitely not bullying* to *Definitely bullying*. This indicates that there is disagreement about which behaviours are seen as bullying, for example, item 3, " A student says mean and hurtful things to make fun of another student," although meeting the above criteria to be considered bullying by participants, also received a full range of responses, including the response, *Definitely not bullying*.

To determine which of the pre-established categories of bullying behaviours the students considered to be bullying, the following criteria were established: a category was considered to be identified as indicative of bullying behaviours by the students if the mean and median for the category was greater than four (*Probably bullying*) and the mode was five (*Definitely bullying*). According to the criteria stated

Table II

Items Rated as Bullying by Student Participants

Item	Mean
A student says mean and hurtful things to make fun of another student.	4.67
A student calls another student mean and hurtful names.	4.74
A student hits another student.	4.58
A student pushes another student.	4.49
A student shoves around another student.	4.61
A student locks another student inside a room.	4.35
A student lies or spreads false rumours about another student.	4.28
A student makes fun of another student because of their religion.	4.67
A student makes unwanted sexual comments to another student.	4.22
A student tries to touch another student in an unwanted sexual way.	4.14
A student is teased because of their skin colour.	4.63
A group of students calls another student mean and hurtful names.	4.55
A group of students shove around another student.	4.71
A group of students always makes unwanted sexual comments to another student.	4.27
A student shoves around another student all the time.	4.65
A student always calls another student mean and hurtful names.	4.58
A student always lies or spreads false rumours about other students.	4.38
A bigger student pushes a smaller student.	4.76

Item	Mean
A popular student calls a less popular student mean and hurtful names.	4.56
A high school student makes fun of a junior high school student because of their religion.	4.73
A student in grade nine lies or spreads false rumours about a student in grade seven.	4.32

Note. Median and mode values for all above items are 5.

above, participants judged items corresponding to the following categories to be indicative of bullying behaviour: physically aggressive behaviour, verbally aggressive behaviour, relationally aggressive behaviour, discrimination, and sexual harassment. Table III provides a list of the categories and their means (see Appendix C for a list of the items in each category).

Methodological comparison. A comparison of the bullying behaviours included in students' perceptions of bullying as a function of how they are asked about their perceptions is presented in Table IV. This table compares the results of Section A, in which students were asked to give a spontaneous example of bullying, to Section B, in which students were asked directly whether a particular form of behaviour was bullying. From these results, it appears as though a higher percentage of students considered the categories of bullying behaviour to be bullying when directly asked, as compared to the percentage of students who included that category of bullying behaviour in a spontaneous definition of bullying.

Investigation of the elements of Olweus' definition. In addition to the categories above, the list of items derived from the definition of bullying used by Olweus (2001) was examined for student perceptions of bullying. The items are presented in Table V. Two of the items were derived from a section of Olweus' definition of bullying stating examples of behaviour that is not bullying behaviour. These items were also not considered to be bullying by the participants. Of the remaining 11 items derived from Olweus' definition of bullying, 7 met the criteria as items that the students considered to be bullying. From this table it is also evident that there is some degree of uncertainty as to whether some of the behaviours Olweus

Table III

Categories of Investigated Behaviours

Category	Mean
Non-aggressive behaviour	1.69
Physically aggressive behaviour	4.59
Verbally aggressive behaviour	4.59
Social exclusion	3.59
Relationally aggressive behaviour	4.21
Discrimination	4.44
Sexual harassment	4.21
Aggressive behaviour between equals	2.60

Table IV

Inclusion of Categories of Behaviours in Students Definitions

Category	Section A[s]	Section B[d]
Physically Aggressive	45%	92%
Verbally Aggressive	60%	91%
Relationally Aggressive	3%	73%
Social Exclusion	1%	40%
Sexual Harassment	1%	75%
Discrimination	1%	83%

Notes:

[s] Spontaneous definition of bullying

[d] Directly questioned if the category is bullying

Table V

Items Derived from Olweus' (2001) Definition of Bullying

Item	Mean	SD	Range
Items Meeting the Criteria of Bullying			
A student lies or spreads false rumours about another student.	4.28	.92	3
A student locks another student inside a room.	4.35	.98	4
A student pushes another student.	4.49	.80	4
A student hits another student.	4.58	.67	3
A student shoves around another student.	4.61	.69	4
A student says mean and hurtful things to make fun of another student.	4.67	.69	4
A student calls another student mean and hurtful names.	4.74	.51	2
Items Not Meeting the Criteria of Bullying			
A student teases another student in a friendly and playful way.	1.64	.63	3
A student completely ignores another student.	2.45	1.23	4
Two students of about the same strength or power argue or fight.	2.94	1.27	4
A student excludes another student from their group of friends.	3.15	1.26	4
A student sends mean notes to try to make other students dislike another student.	3.86	1.05	4
A student leaves another student out of things on purpose.	3.90	1.08	4

includes in his definition of bullying are in fact considered bullying by participants, namely behaviour from the social exclusion category and one item from the relationally aggressive category.

Question Two: What Are Possible Influences on Students' Tendencies to See Certain Behaviours as Bullying?

Two possible influences on student's tendencies to agree that a certain behaviour is bullying were analyzed: a student's gender, and a student's prior personal experience with the behaviour described in each item (i.e. the extent to which a student may have been the victim of bullying).

Participant gender did not appear to influence the behaviours participants considered to be bullying. Based upon an item by item comparison of means (ANOVA) for all 35 items in Section B of the questionnaire, which assessed the degree to which participants found a certain behaviour to be indicative of bullying, there was no significant difference found between the means of male and female participants.

Participants' experience of being bullied was negatively correlated with the number of behaviours they endorsed as bullying. Results show a significant negative correlation ($-.22, p < .05$) between participants' average experience with the 22 behaviours considered to be bullying by the group and their average perception of the degree to which those behaviours are indicative of bullying. There was also a significant negative correlation ($-.25, p < .05$) between participants' average experience with all 35 items (including non-bullying items) and their average perceptions of the degree to which those behaviours are indicative of bullying.

Question Three: What is the Incidence of Bullying in This Population?

The majority of participants reported that they had experienced bullying. Overall, 73% of participants reported that they had experienced one or more of the 22 behaviours considered to be bullying by the group "a few times" or "once a week or more." By gender, 82% of the male participants and 68% of the female participants reported that they had experienced one or more of the 22 behaviours considered to be bullying by the group "a few times" or "once a week or more."

Furthermore, 22% of the participants reported experiencing more severe bullying. The following criteria were established to determine severe bullying: a student was considered to be experiencing more severe bullying if he or she reported experiencing more than one of the 22 behaviours considered to be bullying by the group "once a week or more." By gender, 36% of the male participants and 14% of the female participants reported that they had experienced more than one of the 22 behaviours considered to be bullying by the group "once a week or more."

Overall, male participants ($M = 1.91$) were more likely than female participants ($M = 1.55$) to report experiencing bullying as defined by the 22 behaviours considered to be bullying by the group $F(1, 81) = 9.751, p < .05$. The proportion of variance accounted for by the participant's gender (η^2) was 2.4%. Male participants ($M = 2.24$) were also more likely than female participants ($M = 1.52$) to report experiencing items from the physically aggressive behaviours category $F(1, 81) = 24.391, p < .05$). The proportion of variance accounted for by the participant's gender (η^2) was 1.1%. These findings are supported by similar findings in the

literature that males tend to be more involved in bullying than females (e.g., Espelage & Holt, 2001; Javonen & Graham, 2001).

Discussion

Elements of Bullying Included in a Spontaneous Definition

When students' spontaneous definitions of bullying were examined using pre-determined categories, two main facets of bullying emerged: physically aggressive behaviours and verbally aggressive behaviours. It appears as though the other types of behaviours examined did not quickly come to mind when students began to think about what bullying entails. In examining the elements of bullying included in Farrington's (1993) criteria, it appears as though students are mostly focused upon the behaviours involved in bullying, and tended to focus less upon the other elements of intent, imbalance of power, repetition, lack of provocation, and the effect on the target. However, approximately one in five students identified that the intent of the aggressor and an existing imbalance of power between the aggressor and target was important when defining bullying. These findings support the assertion that students may not necessarily view all elements of Farrington's criteria to be important in defining bullying. These findings are partially in line with the findings of Madsen (1996) and Guerin and Hennessey (2002), but do not support the idea that the effect on the target of bullying is central to student's definitions of bullying. A limitation in comparing these findings to other research on students' spontaneous definitions of bullying is that students were asked to place their definitions in writing, meaning that the researcher was unable to clarify any vague responses. These findings suggest that students may focus mainly upon the behaviours that should be considered bullying and less upon the more contextual elements of many researchers' definitions.

Coercion as a Facet of Bullying

When students' un-prompted definitions of bullying were examined for further categories, an unexpected facet of bullying emerged. Approximately one in four students included the concept of coercion as an aspect of bullying. This reflects an often used stereotypical account of bullying presented often in the media, involving a child bullying another child for lunch money (e.g., Anthony, 2004). Many students went beyond citing this specific example and defined bullying in terms of threats attached to a punishment for non-compliance, or being forced to do something they did not want to do. This may also be important in that a threat can be perceived as continuing into the future. The idea of threatening behaviour is sometimes included in researchers' descriptions of verbally aggressive behaviours (Rivers & Smith, 1994), or psychologically aggressive behaviours (Guerin & Hennessey, 2002). However, based upon the content analysis conducted in this study, students may see coercion as a separate form of behaviour. Arora (1996) provides support for this argument in her discussion of a model of aggressive behaviour in which coercion, threats, and punishment for non-compliance are factors. This may also be related to the phenomenon of peer pressure, in which students feel they are forced to do something they do not want to do.

Behaviours Considered to be Bullying

When provided with examples of bullying and asked to indicate if a certain behaviour was indicative of bullying, students tended to agree that physically, verbally, and relationally aggressive behaviours are bullying, as are behaviours involving sexual harassment. However, there was a wide range of opinions among

students as to what constitutes bullying behaviour, with many items on the questionnaire receiving the full range of responses.

The low internal consistency reliability of the discrimination category indicates that these items were not considered to be the same class of behaviours by the participants. These items reflected both verbally aggressive and socially exclusionary behaviour which was motivated by differences in skin colour, gender, sexual orientation, and religion. It may be that the type of aggressive behaviour may be more important in determining a category of bullying behaviour than the motivation for the behaviour in students' understandings of bullying.

It also appears that on average, students are uncertain as to whether social exclusion should be considered bullying. Perhaps students are uncertain about whether social exclusion is bullying because it is a more passive or indirect behaviour. These findings are consistent with the literature showing that students do not consider social exclusion to be a form of bullying (Boulton, 1997; Guerin & Hennessey). A limitation of this study is that the wording of the social exclusion items may have been too vague. Perhaps students consider social exclusion in some contexts (e.g.,, a group moving to another side of the lunch room when a student tries to sit with them) to be more indicative of bullying than other contexts (e.g., not including someone because they have just called you names).

Methodological Comparison

A higher percentage of students included all categories of behaviour in their definition of bullying when directly asked, as compared to when asked to spontaneously define bullying. Participants in this study were asked to form

spontaneous examples or definitions of bullying before being asked about specific behaviours, so that their spontaneous definitions of bullying would not be influenced by information presented later in the questionnaire. Tables VI and VII present a comparison of the findings of this study to that of other studies with similar methodologies. It appears that there is a general trend for students to include more behaviours in their definitions of bullying when directly asked as opposed to when asked to spontaneously give a definition or example of bullying. This finding may have implications for further research, in that a students' spontaneous definition of bullying, the one they may be working from when completing a questionnaire, may be quite different from what they would agree that bullying is when presented with different options. For example, a student may agree that relationally aggressive behaviour is bullying when directly asked, yet that same student may not necessarily be thinking about relational forms of aggression when simply asked about bullying.

Investigation of the Elements of Olweus' Definition

Based upon an investigation of the types of behaviour included in Olweus' (2001) definition of bullying, it appears that the students in this study generally agree that the majority of behaviours in this definition are undoubtedly reflective of bullying. However, there appears to be some uncertainty among the students regarding a few of the particular behaviours. In particular, the students appeared to be unsure about all of the behaviours representing social exclusion in Olweus' definition. They were also uncertain about an item representing relational aggression,

Tables VI & VII

Comparison of Students' Spontaneous Definitions of Bullying

Category	Results: Section A[s]	Guerin & Hennessey (2002)[s]	Land (2003)[s]
Physically Aggressive	45%	76%	63%
Verbally Aggressive	60%	84%	
Relationally Aggressive	3%	19%	
Social Exclusion	1%	12%	
Sexual Harassment	1%		10%
Discrimination	1%		

Comparison of Students' Inclusion in a Definition When Directly Asked

Category	Results: Section B[d]	Swain (1998)[d]	Boulton et al. (1999)[d]
Physically Aggressive	92%	93%	
Verbally Aggressive	91%	96%	52%[1]
Relationally Aggressive	73%	97%	
Social Exclusion	40%	87%	60%[2]
Sexual Harassment	75%		
Discrimination	83%		

Notes:

[s] Spontaneous definition of bullying (e.g., interview, written example)

[d] Directly questioned if the category is bullying (e.g., questionnaire)

[1] This number is the average number of students from Sweden and England including this behaviour: 84% of English students, and 29% of Swedish students included verbally aggressive behaviours.

[2] This number is the average number of students from Sweden and England including this behaviour: 26% of English students, and 83% of Swedish students included social exclusion.

namely sending "mean notes to try to make students dislike another student."

Interestingly, students also appeared to be unsure about the item, "two students of about the same strength or power argue or fight," while generally certain that friendly teasing was not bullying. These results indicate that while Olweus' definition is generally in line with students' definitions of bullying, there are some key areas where students are not certain, namely in regards to social exclusion, certain forms of relational aggression and fighting among two students of the same strength. A possible explanation of these findings is that only the *behaviours* involved in Olweus' definition were investigated. Olweus places his definition in the context of repeated behaviours involving a power imbalance, with the phrase, "when we talk about bullying, these things happen repeatedly, and it is difficult for the student being bullied to defend himself or herself," (p. 6). Due to the nature of the questionnaire, this information was not presented to the students when deciding upon the specific behaviours included in Olweus' definition.

Possible Influences on Students' Definitions of Bullying

As expected, no relationship was found between gender and students' agreement that particular behaviours are bullying. Based upon the 22 behaviours the participants considered to be undoubtedly indicative of bullying behavior, a relationship was found between students' previous experiences as the target of bullying and the extent to which they considered these behaviours to be bullying. The cause of this relationship is unknown; perhaps students' experiences with bullying influences their definitions of bullying, or perhaps students' definitions of bullying influences how likely they are to remember having experienced this

behaviour. It is also possible that a third variable, such a student's personality accounts for the variation in both experience of and definition of bullying. In any case, the effect size of this correlation is fairly small, meaning that the variables share only about 5% of their variance in common. Although significant, the small amount of shared variance makes the practical importance of this finding questionable.

The Incidence of Bullying Among These Students

Overall, the majority of the students who participated in this study reported experiencing what they as a group consider to be bullying. Approximately one in five students reported being bullied once per week or more. This finding is in keeping with the statistics reported by O'Connell and colleagues (1999) that approximately one-third of students reports being bullied. The difference between this finding and that reported by O'Connell and colleagues is the higher proportion of students who reported being bullied once or twice, or a few times. It is possible that bullying may be a more widespread problem in the school sampled for this study, particularly in a more incidental, and less repeated, form. It is also possible that the emphasis placed on repetition of behaviour by most researchers tend to underestimate the amount of bullying-type behaviours that may take place less frequently.

It was also found that males reported experiencing more bullying than females, particularly more physical forms of bullying. This finding is supported by research that boys tend to be involved in bullying more often than females (Espelage & Holt, 2001; Juvonen & Graham, 2001).

General Conclusions

Generally, these findings suggest that bullying is a complex concept that is difficult to concisely define. From the students' perspectives, the most important part of bullying appears to be the behaviours involved. While there tends to be agreement between researchers and students as to the inclusion of the behaviours of verbal, physical and relational aggression in a definition of bullying, students are more uncertain as to whether social exclusion should be considered bullying. This may be due to students having different interpretations of what constitutes social exclusion. In addition, although not necessarily always considered to be bullying by many theorists and researchers, it appears that coercion, discrimination and sexual harassment are considered to be bullying by students. Perhaps a re-consideration of the definition of bullying used by researchers is in order.

Also, it is clear that students and researchers may not always be defining bullying in the same way. If it is determined by schools or policy makers that behaviours such as social exclusion are to be considered bullying, it is clear that education programs will be crucial, as students are uncertain as to whether this behaviour should be considered bullying. Alternatively, perhaps intervention and prevention programs could be changed to reflect the definitions of bullying currently held by students. In addition, although the correlation is small, knowing that students who have been the targets of bullying may be more likely not to consider their experiences to be bullying, will allow school policy makers to target interventions to those at risk for bullying in a different manner, perhaps avoiding the word bullying altogether.

Limitations of the Study

Many of the more specific limitations of this study have been discussed above. A more general limitation of this study includes the sampling procedure used. The fact that only one school was sampled makes it difficult to generalize the results of this study to a wider population. The results found in this study may be a result of the culture or attitudes of students attending this particular school. In addition, the students sampled in this study were from a rural school, making it more difficult to compare the results to other research studies which tend to sample schools in large city centres. In addition, while this study did examine the extent to which students had experienced bullying as a target, the number of students who may have been bullies was not examined. This may also have been a factor in student definitions of bullying.

Future Directions

A better understanding of student's definitions of bullying can aid in the clarity and comparability of research and practical programs aimed at bullying. For example, future research on how students' understanding of coercion may relate to bullying may increase the depth of information known about students' perceptions of bullying. Research on students' inclusion of coercion as a form of bullying is needed, particularly in the adolescent years when peer pressure and sexual coercion become issues.

Further research is also warranted to examine the behaviours which students include in their definitions of bullying, particularly research aimed at determining whether certain contexts for social exclusion are considered differently by students

than others. Future research may also look at how students' spontaneous definitions of bullying relate to whether they consider specific behaviours to be bullying when directly asked.

Finally, as the results of this study suggest that caution be used in assuming that students agree with the definition of bullying provided by Olweus in his Bully/Victim questionnaire, further research may be warranted to clarify whether students who are presented with a definition at the beginning of a questionnaire will continue to use that definition, or will revert back to their own definitions of bullying. A richer understanding of the definitions of bullying by those most involved could be of great importance to future research in the area and could present implication implications for school bullying policies as well as prevention and intervention strategies.

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Appendix A

Definition of Terms

Adolescent:	An individual who is between the ages of 12 and 17.
Aggression:	Negative acts carried out to intentionally harm another (Smith et al., 2002).
Discrimination:	Aggressive actions targeted at minority groups
Mobbing:	Violent behaviours directed at one student by a group of students.
Non-aggressive behaviour:	Behaviour which is not aggressive in nature, such as passing a note to another student.
Physical aggression:	Behaviours which are physical in nature, such as punching, kicking, or pushing.
Relational aggression:	Purposeful damage to peer relationships (Crick and Grotepeter, 1995).
Target:	The person to which a bullying behaviour has been directed. This word is used in place of "victim."
Teasing:	Playful verbal taunts not meant to hurt the target.
Sexual Harassment:	Sexual behaviour that is unwelcome.
Social Exclusion:	Excluding or leaving a person out of group activities
Verbal aggression:	Verbal behaviours such as taunts, and name-calling.
Victimization:	A person being the target of various aggressive or abusive acts (Salmivalli, 2001).

Appendix B

Age: _____

Grade: _____

Gender: Male / Female
(please circle)

Bullying Questionnaire

There are no right or wrong answers for this questionnaire, we are interested in your opinions. Please answer honestly, and remember that your name is not included on this questionnaire.

Please answer this question before turning to the next page.

Section A: What is bullying?

Take a moment to think about bullying. In the box below, please write down an example of bullying that you think is typical (this could be something that you have experienced or seen). You do not have to use names.

Section B: Is this bullying?

Please read these sentences and decide if the behaviour is an example of **bullying** or not. Circle the number that is the best choice for what *you* think about the sentence.

	Definitely NOT Bullying	Probably NOT Bullying	Unsure	Probably Bullying	Definitely Bullying
1. A student teases another student in a friendly and playful way.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Two students of about the same strength or power argue or fight.	1	2	3	4	5
3. A student says mean and hurtful things to make fun of another student.	1	2	3	4	5
4. A student calls another student mean and hurtful names.	1	2	3	4	5
5. A student completely ignores another student.	1	2	3	4	5
6. A student excludes another student from their group of friends.	1	2	3	4	5
7. A student leaves another student out of things on purpose.	1	2	3	4	5
8. A student hits another student.	1	2	3	4	5
9. A student pushes another student.	1	2	3	4	5
10. A student shoves around another student.	1	2	3	4	5
11. A student locks another student inside a room.	1	2	3	4	5
12. A student lies or spreads false rumours about another student.	1	2	3	4	5

	Definitely NOT Bullying	Probably NOT Bullying	Unsure	Probably Bullying	Definitely Bullying
13. A student sends mean notes to try to make other students dislike another student.	1	2	3	4	5
14. A student makes fun of another student by calling them "gay."	1	2	3	4	5
15. A student makes fun of another student because of their religion.	1	2	3	4	5
16. A student makes unwanted sexual comments to another student.	1	2	3	4	5
17. A student tries to touch another student in an unwanted sexual way.	1	2	3	4	5
18. A student is left out of things because of their gender.	1	2	3	4	5
19. A student is teased because of their skin colour	1	2	3	4	5
20. A student passes a note to another student.	1	2	3	4	5
21. A group of students completely ignores another student.	1	2	3	4	5
22. A group of students calls another student mean and hurtful names.	1	2	3	4	5
23. A group of students shove around another student.	1	2	3	4	5
24. A group of students tease another student in a friendly and playful way.	1	2	3	4	5
25. A group of students always makes unwanted sexual comments to another student.	1	2	3	4	5

	Definitely NOT Bullying	Probably NOT Bullying	Unsure	Probably Bullying	Definitely Bullying
26. A student shoves around another student all the time.	1	2	3	4	5
27. A student always excludes another student from their group of friends.	1	2	3	4	5
28. A student always calls another student mean and hurtful names.	1	2	3	4	5
29. A student always spreads false rumours about other students.	1	2	3	4	5
30. A bigger student pushes a smaller student.	1	2	3	4	5
31. A popular student calls a less popular student mean and hurtful names.	1	2	3	4	5
32. A high school student makes fun of a junior high school student because of their religion.	1	2	3	4	5
33. A student in grade nine spreads false rumours about a student in grade seven.	1	2	3	4	5
34. A student with many friends excludes a student with no friends from their group.	1	2	3	4	5
35. Two students who are friends get into a fight.	1	2	3	4	5

Section C: Has this happened to you?

The next section is about *your* experience with some of the above situations. Please check the box that best describes your experience. We are interested in **whether this has happened to you**.

	This has **NEVER** happened to me	This has happened to me **ONCE OR TWICE**	This has happened to me **A FEW TIMES**	This happens to me **ONCE A WEEK or more**
1. A student teases you in a friendly and playful way.				
2. You and another student of about the same strength or power argue or fight.				
3. A student says mean and hurtful things to make fun of you.				
4. A student calls you mean and hurtful names.				
5. A student completely ignores you.				
6. A student excludes you from their group of friends.				
7. A student leaves you out of things on purpose.				
8. A student hits you.				
9. A student pushes you.				
10. A student shoves you around.				
11. A student locks you inside a room.				
12. A student lies or spreads false rumours about you.				
13. A student sends mean notes to try to make other students dislike you.				

	This has **NEVER** happened to me	This has happened to me **ONCE OR TWICE**	This has happened to me **A FEW TIMES**	This happens to me **ONCE A WEEK or more**
14. A student makes fun of you by calling you "gay."				
15. A student makes fun of you because of your religion.				
16. A student makes unwanted sexual comments to you.				
17. A student tries to touch you in an unwanted sexual way.				
18. You are left out of things because of your gender.				
19. You are teased because of your skin colour				
20. A student passes a note to you.				
21. A group of students completely ignores you.				
22. A group of students call you mean and hurtful names.				
23. A group of students shove you around.				
24. A group of students tease you in a friendly and playful way.				
25. A group of students always make unwanted sexual comments to you.				
26. A student shoves you around all the time.				
27. A student always excludes you from their group of friends.				
28. A student always calls you mean and hurtful names				

	This has **NEVER** happened to me	This has happened to me **ONCE OR TWICE**	This has happened to me **A FEW TIMES**	This happens to me **ONCE A WEEK or more**
29. A student always spreads false rumours about you.				
30. A bigger student pushes you.				
31. A popular student calls you mean and hurtful names.				
32. A high school student makes fun of you because of your religion.				
33. A student in grade nine spreads false rumours about you.				
34. A student with many friends excludes you from their group.				
35. You get into a fight with one of your friends.				

Thank you for your help with this questionnaire!

Appendix C

Items included in each category of investigated bullying behaviour

Non-aggressive behaviour:

1. A student teases another student in a friendly and playful way.

20. A student passes a note to another student.

24. A group of students tease another student in a friendly and playful way.

Physically aggressive behaviour:

8. A student hits another student.

9. A student pushes another student.

10. A student shoves around another student.

11. A student locks another student inside a room.

23. A group of students shove around another student.

26. A student shoves around another student all the time.

30. A bigger student pushes a smaller student.

Verbally aggressive behaviour:

3. A student says mean and hurtful things to make fun of another student.

4. A student calls another student mean and hurtful names.

14. A student makes fun of another student by calling them "gay."

15. A student makes fun of another student because of their religion.

22. A group of students calls another student mean and hurtful names.

28. A student always calls another student mean and hurtful names.

31. A popular student calls a less popular student mean and hurtful names.

32. A high school student makes fun of a junior high school student because of their religion.

Social exclusion:

5. A student completely ignores another student.

6. A student excludes another student from their group of friends.

7. A student leaves another student out of things on purpose.

18. A student is left out of things because of their gender.

19. A student is left out of things because of their skin colour.

21. A group of students completely ignores another student.

27. A student always excludes another student from their group of friends.

34. A student with many friends excludes a student with no friends from their group.

Relationally aggressive behaviour:

12. A student lies or spreads false rumours about another student.

13. A student sends mean notes to try to make other students dislike another student.

29. A student always spreads false rumours about other students.

33. A student in grade nine spreads false rumours about a student in grade seven.

Discrimination:

14. A student makes fun of another student by calling them "gay."

15. A student makes fun of another student because of their religion.

18. A student is left out of things because of their gender.

19. A student is left out because of their skin colour.

32. A high school student makes fun of a junior high school student because of their religion.

Sexual harassment:

16. A student makes unwanted sexual comments to another student.

17. A student tries to touch another student in a sexually inappropriate way.

25. A group of students always makes unwanted sexual comments to another student.

Aggressive behaviour between equals:

2. Two students of about the same strength or power argue or fight.

35. Two students who are friends get into a fight.

Appendix D

Content Analysis: Inductive and Deductive Categories

Category	Frequency
Verbally aggressive behaviour	53
Physically aggressive behaviour	40
Coercion	24
Effect on target	17
Power imbalance	16
Intention	11
Stealing	7
Group behaviour	6
Picking on	5
Repetition	6
Relationally aggressive behaviour	3
Bystanders	2
Fighting	2
Discrimination	1
Sexual Harassment	1
Social Exclusion	1
Lack of provocation	1
Other	4

Note: Frequency refers to the number of participants (n = 88) who included responses from the category in their typical example of bullying.

Appendix E

FACULTIES OF EDUCATION AND EXTENSION
RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD
(REB)

I. Application for Ethics Review of Proposed Research

(revised June 11 02)

Name: Shelagh Dunn **Student ID (if applicable):** 0267357

E-mail: stdunn@ualberta.ca

Complete mailing address (if student): #302 – 8509 106A Street. Edmonton, AB, T6E 4J8

Project Title: Student and Parent Perceptions of Bullying

Project Deadlines:
Starting date (yy/mm/dd): 03/09/01 Ending date (yy/mm/dd): 04/08/31
If your project will extend beyond the original ending date, you must submit a *Request for Change in Research Study*.

Annual Reporting
If your project extends beyond one year from the date of REB approval, you will be required to submit an annual status report at the end of each year of the project. Projects are subject to a complete re-submission after 3 years.

Status (if student):
( ) Master's Project (x) Master's Thesis ( ) Doctoral Dissertation ( ) Other (specify):

Funding (if applicable):
( ) Grant Application ( ) Contract Research (x) Non-Funded Research ( ) Other (specify):

I, the applicant, agree to notify the Research Ethics Board in writing of any changes in research design, procedures, sample, etc. that arise after the REB approval has been granted. A *Request for Change in Research Study* form must receive approval from REB before the modified research can proceed.

I also agree to notify the REB immediately if any untoward or adverse event occurs during my research, and/or if data analysis or other review reveals undesirable outcomes for the participants.

I have read the University of Alberta Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants [GFC Policy Manual, Section 66 http://www.ualberta.ca/~unisecr/policy/sec66.html] and agree to comply with these Standards in conducting my research.

Signature of Applicant — Date: Jan 23, 2003

As the supervisor/instructor, I have read and approve submission of this application to the REB, and ensure that the proposed project is compliant with the University of Alberta Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants [GFC Policy Manual, Section 66 http://www.ualberta.ca/~unisecr/policy/sec66.html].

Jerek Trussett — Signature of Supervisor/Instructor — Date: Jan 24, 2003
Printed name of Supervisor/Instructor

ETHICS REVIEW STATUS

(✓) Application approved by REB member ( ) Application approved by Research Ethics Board

( ) Application not approved

Signature of REB Member — Date: Jan 28/03

Distribution: Original to Applicant; Copies to REB file, Supervisor/Instructor (if applicable), Unit student file (if applicable)

Appendix F

Dear Parent/Guardian:

My name is Shelagh Dunn and I am conducting a research study as part of my Masters of Education degree in Counselling Psychology at the University of Alberta. I would like to invite you and your child to take part in my study on student and parent perceptions of bullying, and I have obtained permission from the principal at Onoway Junior/Senior High School to conduct this study in partnership with the school.

How you and your child understand bullying at school is very important to us. There are many different ideas about what the word "bullying" means, and we are interested in what parents and students think. It is my hope that the findings of this study may lead to more effective bullying intervention and prevention strategies for schools and our communities. I intend to publish the results of this study in a scholarly journal, and present them at scholarly conferences. When this happens, no one will be able to tell exactly how you or your child responded to the questionnaire because your name will not be included and only the overall results will be presented.

Your part in the study involves completing a questionnaire which should take approximately 20 minutes to complete. The included questionnaire is to be filled out by **one** parent or guardian. Then, with your permission, your child will be invited to fill out the same questionnaire at school on May 28, 2003.

You and your child **do not** have to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in the study, your consent is given by returning your questionnaire through the mail. Please do not include your name on the questionnaire. If you decide to allow your child to take part in this study, your permission must first be given by signing the enclosed consent form and returning it in the self-addressed envelope. Please return both your questionnaire and the permission slip for your child in the same envelope. Once received, your questionnaire will be separated from the permission slip to maintain your anonymity.

If you give permission for your child to participate, I will invite your child to complete the same questionnaire in class at school. Your child will then also be given the choice to participate in the study or not. The questionnaire will be collected without your child's name. An alternative activity will be planned with the teacher's cooperation for those students who choose not to participate.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact either myself or my supervisor, Dr. Truscott.

Thank you.

Shelagh Dunn
M.Ed. Student
University of Alberta
stdunn@ualberta.ca
(780) 439-8508

Dr. Derek Truscott
Associate Professor of Counselling Psychology
University of Alberta
derek.truscott@ualberta.ca
(780) 492-1161

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of the Faculties of Education and Extension at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at (780) 492-3751.

University of Alberta
Research Consent Form for Parents/Guardians

Please return this form with your son or daughter by **May 28, 2003.**

Title of research study: Student and Parent Perceptions of Bullying

I, _____, hereby [consent/do not consent]
(print name of parent/legal guardian) (please circle)

for _____, in grade ____ to complete a
(print name of student)

questionnaire for a research project conducted by Shelagh Dunn, an M.Ed. student in Educational Psychology at the University of Alberta.

I understand that:

- my child may withdraw from the research at any time without penalty
- all information gathered will be anonymous (the name of my child will not be included on the information collected)
- all information gathered will be treated confidentially and discussed only with a supervisor
- my child will not be identifiable in any documents resulting from this research.

I also understand that the results of this research will be used only in the following:

- research thesis
- presentations and written articles for other researchers, scholars and educators

_____Date signed: _____
signature of parent/legal guardian

For further information concerning the completion of the form, please contact:

Shelagh Dunn
M.Ed. Student
University of Alberta
stdunn@ualberta.ca
(780) 439-8508

Dr. Derek Truscott
Associate Professor of Counselling Psychology
University of Alberta
derek.truscott@ualberta.ca
(780) 492-1161

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of the Faculties of Education and Extension at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at (780) 492-3751.

Introduction Letter to Students

My name is Shelagh Dunn and I am conducting a research study as part of obtaining a Masters of Education degree in Counselling Psychology at the University of Alberta. I would like to invite you to take part in my study on student and parent perceptions of bullying.

To participate, you will complete a questionnaire, which will take about 20 to 30 minutes to do. What you think is important to us. By finding out what you think about bullying, programs that deal with bullying can be made better. Also, schools can do a better job of dealing with bullying. What is found out in this study will be written about, and may be talked about in a presentation. When this happens, no one will be able to tell exactly what you wrote down on the questionnaire because your name will not be included. Only the overall results will be given.

You **do not** have to take part in this study. If you do decide to take part, please do not put your name on the questionnaire, and your questionnaire will only been seen by me and my research supervisor. Not even your parents/guardians or your teachers will be allowed to read your finished questionnaire. I want you to feel that you can be totally honest when you fill it out. If you do not want to take part, an alternative activity will has been arranged with your teacher's help.

When you are finished, you will hand in your questionnaire to me. If you decide part way through that you don't want to finish the questionnaire, just say so on the questionnaire, and your questionnaire will be destroyed and will not be included in the study.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact either myself or my supervisor, Dr. Truscott.

Thank you.

Shelagh Dunn
M.Ed. Student
University of Alberta
stdunn@ualberta.ca
439-8508

Dr. Derek Truscott
Associate Professor of Counselling Psychology
University of Alberta
derek.truscott@ualberta.ca
492-1161

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of the Faculties of Education and Extension at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at (780) 492-3751.

University of Alberta
Research Agreement Form for Students

To participate, you will complete a questionnaire, which will take about 20 to 30 minutes to do. What you think is important to us. By finding out what you think about bullying, programs that deal with bullying can be made better. Also, schools can do a better job of dealing with bullying. What is found out in this study will be written about, and may be talked about in a presentation. When this happens, no one will be able to tell exactly what you wrote down on the questionnaire because your name will not be included. Only the overall results will be given.

You **do not** have to take part in this study. If you do decide to take part, please do not put your name on the questionnaire, and your questionnaire will only been seen by me and my research supervisor. Not even your parents or your teachers will be allowed to read your finished questionnaire. I want you to feel that you can be totally honest when you fill it out. If you do not want to take part, an alternative activity will has been arranged with your teacher's help.

When you are finished, you will hand in your questionnaire to me. If you decide part way through that you don't want to finish the questionnaire, just say so on the questionnaire, and your questionnaire will be destroyed and will not be included in the study.

Thank you.

I have read the letter above and I understand what the study is about. I understand that I do not have to take part if I do not wish to. I understand that my questionnaire will only be looked at by the researchers. I agree to take part in this study.

Signature: _____

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of the Faculties of Education and Extension at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at (780) 492-3751.